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AUTHOR Thorogood, John; King, Lid
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ABSTRACT

Based on widespread teacher perceptions that British upper secondary school students entering advanced language courses are poorly prepared, an approach for making the transition to advanced language instruction is suggested. Teachers are invited to use existing syllabuses creatively to develop language awareness as well as language skills. Four aspects of curriculum design and development are discussed: (1) the need to create a new model of progression through language learning; (2) beginning with and building on students' existing strengths and knowledge level, emphasizing collaboration, self-assessment, and study skills; (3) progressing from known to unknown in syllabus content; and (4) incorporating grammar into a syllabus designed around topics and skills. Specific examples of classroom techniques and activities are provided in French, Spanish, and German. (MSE)

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A CILT series for language teachers

Pathfinder

7

Bridging the gap: GCSE to 'A' level

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Pathfinder 7

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Bridging the gap:
from GCSE to 'A' level

John Thorogood
and
Lid King

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Introduction

Our interest in writing this *Pathfinder* came from a number of sources, not only first-hand experience in the sixth form language class but also quite substantially from the joint findings of teachers taking part in the CILT course on post-16 teaching run at Sèvres in 1990.

School teaching experience has furnished a number of detailed examples of activities, while the Sèvres course has yielded, as well as packs of exemplar teaching material, a broad rationale which has underpinned much of the argument we intend to develop in this book.

We would emphasise that the approach recommended here is not intended to be limited to the most commonly taught European languages, but is applicable to learners of any language at this significant cross-roads in their foreign language learning. We hope the book will provide useful guidelines for any teacher, whether in their first or their thirty-first year of initiating the miracle which takes the language learner from post-GCSE to pre-university.

1. Defining the problem

Perceptions of the new 'A' level student

When considering the first faltering steps in an Advanced level language course, we are reminded of our collective school experiences, for example, a first lower sixth essay homework...*La démocratie fait le lit de la tyrannie. - Discutez.* The title in question had no bearing on what had just been done in the lesson (probably round-the-class translation of *Le Tartuffe),* nor was it destined to illuminate the lesson at which it would be handed in. The dismal quality of the resultant essays was blamed then on the inadequacy of the GCE 'O' level to prepare pupils for the 'A' level course.

This is probably not a fair picture of current practice or teacher attitude, yet in its extreme way offers parallels with the doubts and anxieties expressed by sixth form language teachers. Today's complaint is that there is a 'gap' between the GCSE and the demands of 'A' level courses in modern languages. Somehow, somewhere along the line, GCSE has 'failed to prepare' the learner for the next stage up.

We should give this view a fair hearing for it is not merely the sceptical reaction of those who would happily revert to grammar-translation. It is the sincere concern of those who want to do 'all the right things ' for their students but meet with learning setbacks that send them scurrying for their grammar notes.

There is no shame attached to this anxiety, for the fact is that a majority of language teachers, including relative newcomers to the profession, have personal memories of a traditional learning model. Their perception of the post-GCSE generation of 'A' level beginners is:

- ...that they have a very incomplete knowledge of the grammatical system and that they cannot freely generate language outside known structures.

- ...that their understanding of texts is impressionistic, that they cannot translate from the target language and that they lack experience of extensive reading.

- ...that their lack of general knowledge and maturity is often a barrier to progress in working with adult areas of interest, and means that they cannot cope with sustained texts of undiluted difficulty.

- ...that even by the end of the course they do not match up to the standards of yesteryear.

Myth and reality

While there are grounds for making the first three of these claims, the fourth simply does not stand up to the facts.

The reality of 'A' level results in 1990 was that with an increased *clientèle* (French 'A' level entries up 20.7% on 1989, German entries up 21.5% and Spanish up 12.3%, compared with a smaller, 8%, increase in English) modern languages results had suffered no decline as a result of the GCSE background.

Furthermore, as the table below indicates, increased numbers of candidates were awarded Grade A and overall figures show a slight improvement.

Results for 1990 (Results for 1989 in brackets)

	% of total awarded each grade								
Subject	A	B	C	D	E	Total pass grades (%)	N	U	Total entry (numbers)
French	15.9 (14.5)	17.1 (17.5)	18.8 (19.3)	18.3 (18.4)	14.5 (14.0)	84.6 (83.7)	8.7 (9.1)	6.7 (7.2)	25,966 (21,508)
German	19.6 (18.8)	19.9 (21.7)	18.5 (18.0)	16.2 (16.5)	12.5 (12.2)	86.7 (87.2)	7.5 (7.1)	5.8 (5.7)	9,254 (7,616)
Spanish	20.4 (18.9)	20.8 (20.9)	18.5 (19.9)	16.8 (16.4)	12.1 (12.3)	88.6 (88.4)	6.4 (6.7)	5.0 (4.9)	3,496 (3,112)

So what skills had these learners acquired during their sixth form studies? Given the range of task types set by the 'A' level boards, they must have been capable of:

- gist and detailed comprehension of quite long written articles on matters of adult interest (possibly including an element of actual translation);

- gist and detailed aural comprehension of dialogues and talks of varying length on matters of adult interest (possibly including an element of actual translation);

- elucidation in the target language, including some direct translation, of written material in the mother tongue;

- the use of brief, newly-presented source material, including statistics and quotations, in the target language, to construct a coherent argument (e.g. letter to the press, short speech) on a theme of adult interest;

- the use of substantial, previously-studied source material, including full-length articles, background books, audio- and video-recordings, to write a fully developed essay on one or more prescribed topics of cultural, social or economic interest;

- oral presentation and discussion of a range of factual material, including recently-received stimulus material, general course content and personal occupations, interests and aspirations;

- performance of contextualised linguistic tasks focusing on specific language structures.

Earlier generations of 'A' level examinees will see in such tasks the need for new and challenging levels of expertise, particularly in the oral/aural domain, and for a measure of competence in areas of concern, e.g. sociology, politics, environmental issues, which were conspicuously absent in the syllabuses of a decade ago. In short, many former 'A' level candidates, some of them now teachers, some parents, would be hard-pressed, with their diet of French literature all too often taught in English, to cope with the present-day challenge. It must follow that the new lower sixth language entrant has some special qualities which teachers have already been able to develop in order to achieve the examination results quoted. We need to be explicit about these strengths so that in future we may enlist them to some purpose rather than randomly. They include:

- Enthusiasm. (The very act of commitment to the course is generally ample proof of this.)

- Willingness to communicate. (The increased emphasis on communicative performance with greater acceptance of error has done much to loosen the expressive powers of today's young linguist.)

- Willingness to tackle the unfamiliar. (GCSE authentic reading and listening texts encourage the future 'A' level aspirant to be bolder in adopting comprehension strategies than their predecessors reared on 'doctored' 'O' level texts.)

- Willingness to be creative.

- Familiarity with a number of well-defined themes from GCSE syllabuses.

If we are to entertain the notion of a 'gap' between the GCSE and 'A' level courses, we must be clear what we mean. Insofar as language development is not in any case a smooth continuum (see section 2), we as language teachers should not be unduly alarmed when learners' progress seems temporarily to take a nose-dive. If we add to this in-built factor a requirement at 'A' level for more independently generated language, as opposed to manipulation of familiar structures; if we also remember that 'A' level introduces new factual concepts and task types, the existence of a gap at this particular stage is even less surprising.

While this book is primarily addressed to teachers of the lower sixth, it is worth mentioning that some of the suggestions we make are equally appropriate to the teaching of able learners on GCSE courses. We believe that there is scope within existing syllabuses for creativity and development of language awareness which will take learners well beyond stereotyped tourist transactions.

In the sections which follow we hope to guide the reader, through our approach both to linguistic teaching and our choice and structuring of material into units of study, towards a style of lower sixth programme which will build on the learner's strength and achieve a manageable and non-threatening acceleration towards the pace of the upper sixth.

2. Where are we going?...handling progression

Many of us will probably have had the following experience during our 'A' level teaching. In the second term of the course the teacher is accosted by an able and earnest pupil (in our case her name was Emma) with a problem:

> *The thing is Sir/Miss/Jim.., I like French/Spanish/ German, but I don't really know what I'm learning.*

Quite often the teacher has to agree.

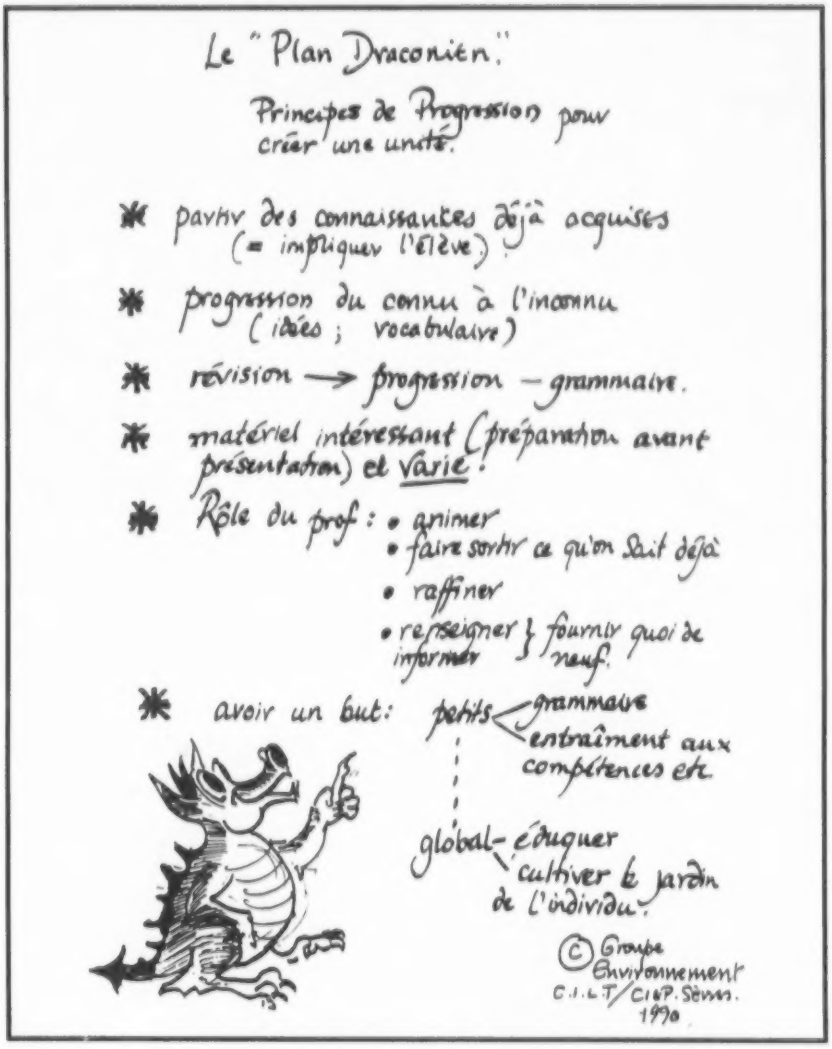
The old grammatical certainties in terms of progression (life begins with the definite article, proceeds through the childhood of the present tense (*il* form) to end in the misery and confusion of the imperfect subjunctive) have been replaced by a far more nebulous world of topics, skills, functions and notions. And where is the progression in that - for either learner or teacher?

It might be heresy to say it, in this world of Attainment Targets, Threshold Levels and NVQs, but in one sense there is no such clear progression. Language learning - like life - is not actually a smooth ride from Level 1 to 99. It can be a patchy, idiosyncratic and chaotic process, in which the learner may progress, fall back, and then zoom into the stratosphere after months of idleness. Our task as teachers may be to help find the keys to enable each learner to make her own (we hope) enjoyable journey.

However, this comforting theory of unalterable chaos is not enough. Having largely replaced the idea of progress through level of grammatical difficulty, we do have a responsibility to establish new models for language learning progression. This is important, not only for Emma's understanding of her own learning, but also for the sanity of the teacher. We, too, have had our heads filled with the clutter of sleepless nights - 'Did we 'do' that topic properly? Can they cope with a listening comprehension? Is there life after Whitmarsh?'

Where then do we start in order to construct a new model? The experience of the Sèvres course suggests that we begin with the learner's existing strengths and with what this learner can already do and what s/he already knows. Any system of 'progression' which fails to do this is handicapped from the outset.

Teachers taking part in the course, having duly considered the strengths and weaknesses of likely learners, proposed the *Plan Draconien* on page 7.


Le "Plan Draconien".
Principes de Progression pour créer une unité.
partir des connaissances déjà acquises (= impliquer l'élève)
progression du connu à l'inconnu (idées ; vocabulaire)
révision → progression — grammaire.
matériel intéressant (préparation avant présentation) et varié.
Rôle du prof : • animer
• faire sortir ce qu'on sait déjà
• raffiner
• renseigner } fournir quoi de
informer } neuf.
avoir un but: petits — grammaire
entraînement aux compétences etc.
global — éduquer
cultiver le jardin de l'individu.
© Groupe Environnement C.I.L.T./CIEP. Sèvres. 1990

Our hypothetical student has a number of commonly quoted characteristics (see pp 2, 4-5) - e.g. 'incomplete knowledge of the grammatical system'...'cannot translate'....*but*...'enthusiasm'...'willingness to communicate'. While all these strengths and weaknesses do not reside in any given student, we hope the reader will easily recognise them. What are the implications of this for the first months of an advanced course?

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3. Starting with the student - *partir des connaissances acquises*

'Getting to know you' - the importance of group dynamics

The likelihood is that our student will be (relatively) enthusiastic, ready to communicate, and used to working in pairs or groups. It will also be crucial during the 'A' level course that the students are able to collaborate and indeed to discuss often quite personal or controversial subject matter. Although, when considering the range of topics to be covered in the course it may be thought advisable to avoid an unremitting diet of doom and disaster, there can still be little doubt that one of the great benefits of the new courses is the opportunity which they provide for students to clarify often difficult ideas. The fact that this process takes place in a foreign language can actually be helpful - removing one layer of inhibition and embarrassment for teacher and student alike. Indeed, this process can encapsulate both what we have identified as the global aim of language teaching - *cultiver le jardin de l'individu* - and the more specific linguistic *entraînement aux compétences*. How many times have we discovered that the key to real linguistic progress - the 'soaring into the stratosphere' referred to on p 6 - is found when the learner is actually, even passionately, interested in the subject matter ('topic'), when we actually forget about the medium (French, German, Spanish...) because of our concern with the message (about Ecology, Truffaut, Immigration, German reunification...). In short, when there is a **point** to the communication taking place in the classroom.

It is therefore especially important during the first weeks of an advanced course to build on the existing strengths of the GCSE student in order to establish a collaborative mode of working and an atmosphere of trust. This can be done in a number of ways, as in the following activity devised for a Spanish class:

¿ Qué tenemos en común?

Preparación: Ninguna

1. Los estudiantes se sientan por parejas.
2. El estudiante **A** hace preguntas al estudiante **B** y vice versa.
3. Los dos tienen que descubrir 5 cosas que tienen en común y 5 cosas en las que difieren.
4. Ambos cuentan sus resultatados al resto de la clase.

...or this one which was used with a new French class:

Point de départ - jeu de mémoire

i. Tout le monde est assis dans un cercle.
ii. Tout le monde doit se présenter et se décrire avec un adjectif...

e.g.: *Je m'appelle Michelle et je suis enthousiaste.*

iii. On doit se souvenir de ce que les autres ont déjà dit...

e.g.: *Elle s'appelle Michelle, elle est enthousiaste. Je m'appelle Pierre, je suis sérieux.*

There are undoubtedly many other types of exercise which could be added in this context. The point is to realise the importance of this kind of work, not only as 'ice-breakers' but in order to establish good working practices in the group.

The tools for the job - self assessment and study skills

One implication of our basic premise is that we will be asking learners to take more responsibility for their own learning post-16 than had previously been the case. They will not be able to do this unless they are helped to develop the strengths they have - to become a more independent learner. This implies a level of self-awareness that is not automatic in any of us. One specific suggestion for developing this understanding is the self-evaluation sheet to be used at the beginning of the course and then revised throughout the learner's progress.

CONNAISSANCE DE SOI

Veuillez remplir HONNÊTEMENT le questionnaire ci-dessous.
Une fois rempli, gardez-le dans votre carnet personnel.

a. Quel genre de personne êtes-vous?
(Cochez comme il convient)

confiant/e	timide
peu sûr/e de quoi	arrogant/e
persistant/e	nerveux/se
paresseux/se	trop conscient/e de soi
ouvert/e d'esprit	dominateur/trice
travaillant dur	modeste
à l'esprit inquisiteur	enthousiaste
nonchalant/e	auto-discipliné
relaxe	bien organisé/e

b. Quel genre d'apprenant êtes-vous?
(Cochez comme il convient)

(i) Aimez-vous...
...travailler seul/e
...travailler à deux
...travailler en groupe

(ii) Quand vous ignorez quelque chose, que préférez-vous faire?...

...trouver la réponse tout/e seul/e
...demander la réponse à quelqu'un d'autre
...demander la réponse à votre prof
...que l'on vous donne la réponse tout de suite

c. Qu'avez-vous aimé / détesté en tant qu'apprenant/e d'une langue étrangère

(i) Parler dans la languagé étrangère

	A	D
- à mes camarades		
- à l'Assistant/e		
- devant toute la classe		
- à l'extérieur de la salle de classe		
- une fois dans le pays étranger		

(ii) Écouter

	A	D
- le prof		
- l'Assistant/e		
- mes camarades		
- une cassette audio		
- et voir une vidéo		

(iii) Lire

	A	D
- seul/e		
- à haute voix		
- pour obtenir des renseignements		
- pour le plaisir		
- comme devoir		

(iv) Écrire

	A	D
- comme devoir		
- pour le plaisir		
- pour moi-même		

This example was first designed at a CILT Workshop on autonomous language learning and was used with non-specialist language learners post-19. However, it has a clear application for our target group. It is a process which will be increasingly familiar (and therefore less daunting) to learners as they are involved in profiling in their earlier school career. Used as part of a post-16 language course, it can not only help the learner become conscious of the process of learning, it can also be a valuable aid to the teacher in defining and developing aims and objectives.

Again, there are many other specific ways in which this can be done - for example the learner diary which is seen as so important for the development of independent learning*. The point is to ensure that this process is reflected in the language programme right from the beginning.

Another area which we have found to be of great importance throughout an advanced course, but especially in the early stages, is that which is often defined as **Study skills**. Again, it is necessary to make explicit the requirements of language learning, and to help the learner develop or acquire the necessary skills. The self-evaluation sheet (and indeed the generalised characterisations outlined on pp 2, 4-5) can be useful here. If, for example, it is true that our archetypal learner - *'lacks experience of extensive reading'*, then it is not enough to throw a text at her, even if it is relevant and interesting, and say *'read'*. The teacher must build on undoubted existing strengths (for example motivation) and show the pupil how to read extensively, and this process must be incorporated into the learning programme.

It is indeed common practice to introduce a reading programme into sixth form studies (if not before). What the learner needs in addition are outlines of the books/texts being offered, guidelines or orientation on 'gist' reading, very general points for summary as well as a weekly target, and a method for recording all of this. One well-tried approach is to introduce learners to selected short stories/articles (where possible with notes, vocabulary) early in the course, setting aside class time (as well as homework) for reading.

This will be reinforced with regular discussions of what pupils are reading, and a Reading Diary to be completed weekly in the target language. Some examples of such recording of private study are shown on p 12, overleaf.

A similar approach is also appropriate for self-accessed listening texts, beginning with short recorded extracts supplied by the teacher and developing to regular off-air listening. Of course, in both cases attention needs to be given to the details of reading and listening, of which more below.

Another skill which cannot be assumed in our learner is the ability to use reference materials, in particular the dictionary. The example on pp 12-13 is of an assignment focusing on dictionary skills in Spanish. While we await the improvements promised by the introduction of the National Curriculum, it will be as well to include activities designed to build these skills into an advanced programme. Gradually learners can be liberated from their props and the choice of material can become less restricted.

---

* see *Autonomy in language learning*, edited by Ian Gathercole, CILT 1990.

Two student diary entries

Les informations à 17h 29.9.88

Y. Lancement réussi pour la navette speciale américaine Discovery. A 11:27 heure américaine, la navette est partie de Cape Canaveral avec un equipage de 5 hommes, pour

AUTHENTIK (10 N°7)

La mort du poete René Char (1907 - 1988)

Le vendredi 19 Février 1988 le poète René Char mourut. Cet homme de quatre vingts ans était né et habita à l'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue et il était

An activity for reinforcing dictionary skills

La rueda del diccionario **Uso del diccionario**

Preparación:
Asegúrate de que tienes suficientes diccionarios monolingües, uno para cada grupo de 2 o 4 estudiantes (los diccionarios de bolsillo no servirán).

1. Organiza a los estudiantes en grupos de 2 o 4 componentes.
2. Entrega a cada grupo un diccionario.
3. Explícales el mecanismo del ejercicio.
4. El estudiante 'A' abre el diccionario al azar y eliga una palabra no muy conocida de esa página.
5. 'A'dice la palabra a los demás. La pronuncia y la deletrea. Puede dar más información, por ejemplo, que parte de la oración es, qué género tiene..., pero nunca deberá decir su definición o su significado.
6. Los otros componentes del grupo hacen preguntas a 'A' para descubrir el significado. 'A' sólo puede contestar 'sí' o 'no'.
7. 'A' recibe un punto si nadie adivina el significado después de haber respondido a unas 20 preguntas.
8. Si alguno de sus compañeros da la solución, éste recibe un punto y por ello, será el próximo en elegir la palabra del diccionario.

Atención:

Para mantener el interés y el dinamismo del ejercicio, no se deben hacer más de 2 o 3 rondas en cada clase.

Si los estudiantes están interesados, repite el ejercicio en una clase posterior.. Dentro de la libertad que tienen parar seleccionar palabras, procura que elijan siempre las que vayan a resultarles útiles.

Essential to all of these types of activity in our view is that they should be seen by the learner to be relevant - and indeed important. Human nature being what it is, this may well mean incorporating such activities into any assessment procedures common in the school or college, such as end of term exams. It will certainly mean setting aside specific time for the development of skills, as a valid activity. Even better, it should lead us to incorporate such 'skill development' into the process of 'language acquisition'.

Accessing the data

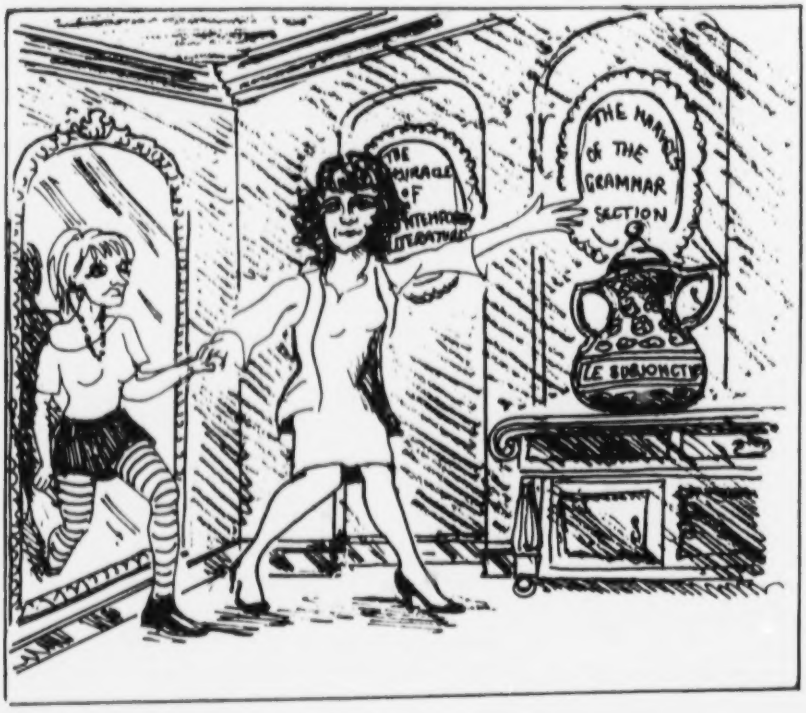
It is only a step from what can be presented in a rather abstract way as a study skill to what may in fact be a central process of language learning - the process by which language is acquired by the learner from the raw material of the authentic text.

For ideas on the range of exploitation activities appropriate at this level one could refer to any one of the excellent works available on the market. There is, however, a point which can often be understated in the 'traditional' communicative approach to an authentic text, and that is the need to involve the learner.

We are probably now used to the three stages of text exploitation outlined in *FRENCH 16 -19 A New Perspective*:

I	WORKING WITHIN THE TEXT
II	WORKING AROUND THE TEXT
III	WORKING AWAY FROM THE TEXT

Sound as this approach is, it can, if mechanically applied, actually lead to learner disenchantment. She is not actually accessing the text, but being 'taken through' it (like Alice through the looking glass).



The teacher is not actually developing what is in the learner, but 'revealing the mystery of the course book'. Alternatively she is sitting up late on Sunday evening devising activities to support a given text. Neither of these appears to us to be a particularly desirable implication of text exploitation. What they overlook as teaching approaches is the potential of the learner as an active participant, not only in language learning, but in the actual process by which language is acquired.

A written text, presented whole and followed by exploitation exercises, can be daunting and appear pointless, especially to the inexperienced learner. On the other hand, that learner brings to the text existing linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as preconceptions and prejudices which we should utilise consciously in accessing the text. This has the additional benefit of reducing the workload on the teacher.

The first example - developed by a participant on the 1990 CILT/CIEP course - is of the use of a written text to stimulate discussion.

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MANIFESTATION LYCEENNE

150 VOITURES INCENDIEES

A Paris, des magasins pillés près du Pont d'Alma

6 policiers hospitalisés

Paris, le 12 novembre
La Police a dû intervenir à la fin de la soirée et utiliser des canons à eau pour disperser la foule.

200 000 manifestants ont défilé dans les rues de Paris, surtout des lycéens, parfois accompagnés de leurs parents. [illegible] été

Que réclame-t-on?

Pourquoi ces défilés non seulement à Paris mais aussi dans de nombreuses villes de province? Pourquoi l'appui des parents? On demande des classes qui ne dépassent pas les 25 élèves, on demande la rénovation des locaux vétustes et insalubres, le renforcement de la sécurité à l'intérie[illegible] des locaux et d[illegible] mei[illegible] conditions

Method:

- Cover up the entire text.
- Reveal the text a line at a time, not necessarily in order, so as to withhold clues which would give away too much too soon.
- Initiate discussion in French about key words as they are revealed,

e.g. ***'manifestation'***- *Qui manifeste normalement? ...Pourquoi...etc 'Voitures...magasins...' 'Autres exemples de la violence...?' 'Que réclame-t-on?' 'Qu'est-ce qu'on réclame normalement...et cette fois?'*

....etc, leading to discussion of police tactics and comparisons with contemporaneous East European demonstrations.

(This has been trialled and the teacher involved reported... *'...gasps of surprise when the full text was revealed...discussion about the education system...also, and more importantly for the group, awareness of press manipulation - headlines seeming to attribute the violence to the innocent majority of students.'*)

A more complex example, involving a range of activities, whole class, group and individual work was developed in discussions at the 1990 CILT Autonomy Workshop. For brevity, we have included here only one or two examples of activities which could be devised under each of the headings A to E.

'Ideas for non-suicidal exploitation'
(Rubrics would be in target language)

A. Brain-storming

Look at the page for 30 seconds
- **What is it about? - How do you know?**

Discuss answers
- **Why? - Are you sure?** (Teacher and class/ groups)

B. Linguistic prediction

In more detail

What do you think this article will be about?
(Clues from non-verbal material and/or skim reading)

What words will you need?
(To understand / talk about the topic)

C. Understanding text

Class derive, or teacher gives, key words (*malaise, éducation publique...)*
Students devise questions for teacher to answer (Who/ What? Where? etc.)

D. Reconstruction of text

Groups give title to 'their' section, or pick out **key phrase.**

Exchange with other groups to establish correct order. (Could be OHP activity with non-verbal clues.)

E. Transformation of text

Have a graffiti wall - Write up your favourite phrase (e.g. *être renvoyé d'une poubelle...lézarde en profondeur).*

Use phrases for writing poems. Write other poems.

Groups do presentation (voluntary).

We have deliberately chosen examples of written texts, in part because they can be reproduced, but also because a written text is actually the most difficult material for a learner to approach. A similar approach - often as support for a written text - is in many ways easier when the source material is an image:

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IMAGES DE LA VIOLENCE

Exercice 1.1 - Travail à deux

Regardez attentivement les images (a) à (e). A tour de rôle, et à l'aide du vocabulaire ci-dessous, décrivez chacune des images à votre partenaire.

Dans l'image on voit / on dirait...
Il semble que...
Je pense que c'est...
C'est peut-être...
L'homme porte...
Par terre il y a ...
La dame / jeune personne semble...
Il / elle a l'air...

L'image m'émeut / me laisse indifférent / me révolte / me répugne/ m'attriste / me désespère...

L'image est...

violente	déchirante
choquante	révoltante
absurde	incroyable

Exercice 1.2 - Travail à deux

Avec votre partenaire, faites une liste des différents aspects de la violence qu'on peut voir dans ces cinq images, et trouvez un titre pour chacune d'entre elles.

or indeed a video text, as we see in the next assignment, which takes the learner from existing knowledge to the stimulus material.

LA FAMILLE TYPIQUE?

(a) Remue-méninges. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie pour vous...

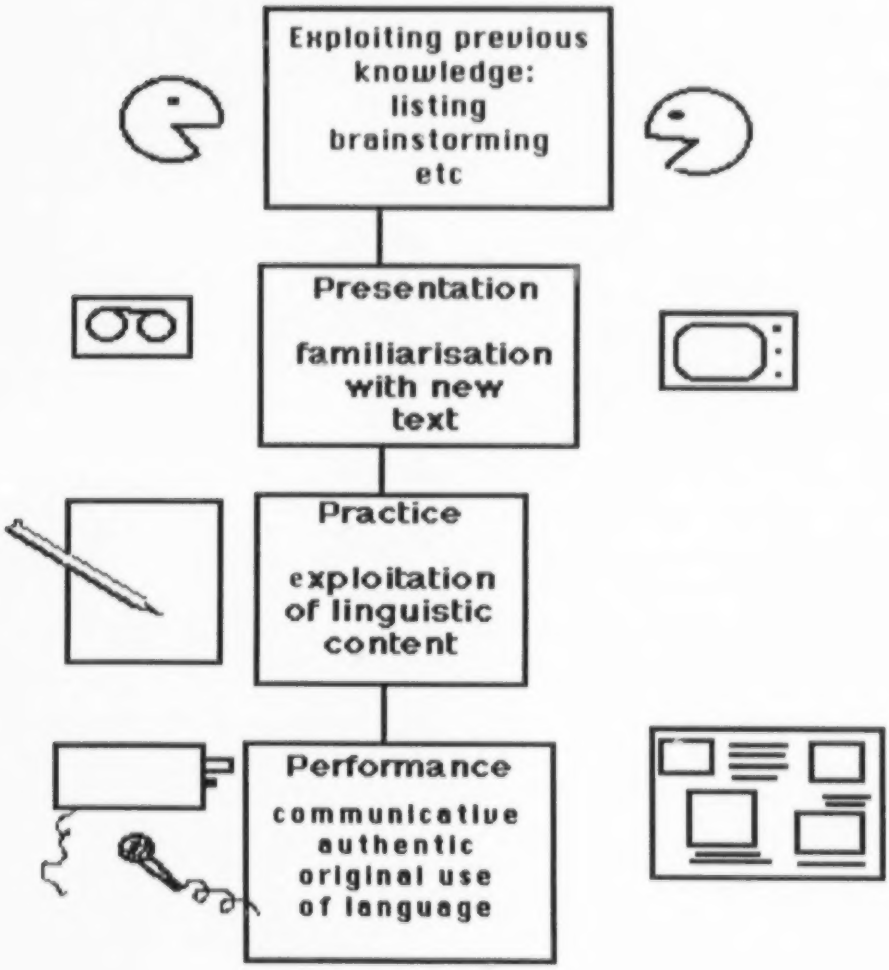
i	maison	iv	loisir
ii	famille	v	rêves et ambitions (faites une liste et comparez avec vos camarades)
iii	enfants		

(b) Idée / image.

Regardez la vidéo sans le son. A chaque arrêt demandez-vous:

- C'est qui?
- C'est où?
- C'est quand?
- Qu'est-ce qui se passe?

These exercises suggest a fourth step in the structure of textual exploitation. It is the phase during which there is a listing and sharing of what learners know and can express in the foreign language - the *'remue-méninges', 'mise en commun'*...what you will. This completes a model of progression for any given text which we can represent as a simple flow diagram.



Summary

We hope that the reader will find these examples useful. They are not, however, presented as models for necessary imitation. There are a whole range of useful activities , and many more still to be invented. If anything is essential, it is not so much a given activity or a particular text, rather it is an approach which may set the following goals:

- **start from what learners know and can do;**
- **get to know your group (and help them know each other);**
- **help the learners to understand their needs and to learn how to learn;**
- **share your teaching techniques with the learners, and let them do some of the work.**

As we learn to do this hen the clutter of our sleepless nights may be replaced by dreamless sleep.....

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4. Content and syllabus - *du connu à l'inconnu*

Just as linguistic progression must be structured, so must the learner's conceptual development. We cannot reasonably expect students to make the leap from extracting detail from a tourist guide in July to summarising a four page article on the rise of the *Front national* in September. This poses two teaching challenges, those of:

- opening the mind of the learner to concepts and experiences hitherto unexplored without generating alarm and despondency;

- helping the learner get into texts of increasing length and complexity.

How far are we entitled to look for progression in our choice of subject matter?

The published syllabuses of the various examination boards do not yield any simple answers to this question. Indeed, the range of content, although parts of it are prescribed for the special 'Topic' papers, is left rather wide open. It is for the Head of Department to decide how to give reasonable coverage to the issues likely to arise in the summative examination which might, outside the Topic paper, range from smoking to civil disturbance and from surrogate mothers to hang-gliding. Obviously, what is needed is a foundation phase which prepares the learner for a wide range of language possibilities. This is perhaps most likely to be achieved through something approximating to the National Curriculum Areas of Experience. It is a solution which has been applied in a number of departments with a fair measure of success.

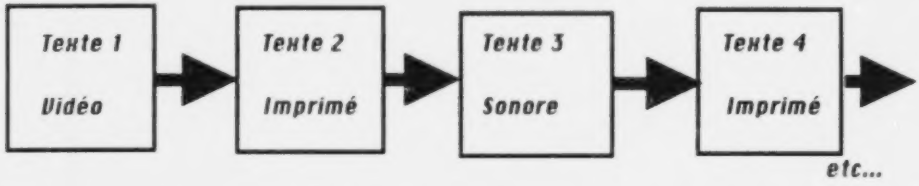
Nonetheless, the choice and sequencing of 'Foundation Topics' has often been arbitrary. We must ask ourselves if there really is any hierarchy, any inherent progression of subject matter. Is 'politics' more advanced than 'health'? Is 'juvenile crime' more appropriate in the first term than 'unemployment'? And so on.

If we believe this is the case, the axis of progression could be expressed purely in terms of topic titles. But should our criterion be one of the conceptual difficulty of the subject or of its capacity to motivate? We can believe that for certain students, *L'Informatique* and the inevitable technical vocabulary and abstract concepts it carries with it could be utterly absorbing, whereas for others a combination of new ideas with new language could be daunting. Perhaps we can look again to the National Curriculum Final Report for inspiration. In that

document, progression is perceived as many-stranded, from *self* to *other*, from *concrete* to *abstract*, from *parochial* to *international*... broadly speaking, from *known* to *unknown*. Such a basis makes suitable for lower sixth studies such topics as *The Family, Education, Work, Entertainment and the Media*, topics with which learners are familiar but the scope of which can be extended.

There is one sense in which the progression from one topic to the next could represent a broadening of horizons for the learner, but it is equally valid to see the progression as occurring **within** the topic. For instance, a unit on the family could begin with day-to-day aspects of the family - routine, physical appearance and personality, etc, and develop into more abstract considerations of sociology, the law and attitudes.

The vehicle for such a progression within each unit of work is the medium of presentation. To ensure variety of treatment and avoid the topic appearing to be 'done to death', a change of medium (e.g. audio —> video —> printed text...), and of genre (e.g. news report —> poem —> sondage....) can be effected at each advancing step in the conceptual/linguistic progression. This process is represented by the diagram below:



When we combine the dimension of text exploitation structure (see p 19) with that of variety of medium, we arrive at a teaching/learning sequence such as is illustrated in the diagram on pp 24-25.

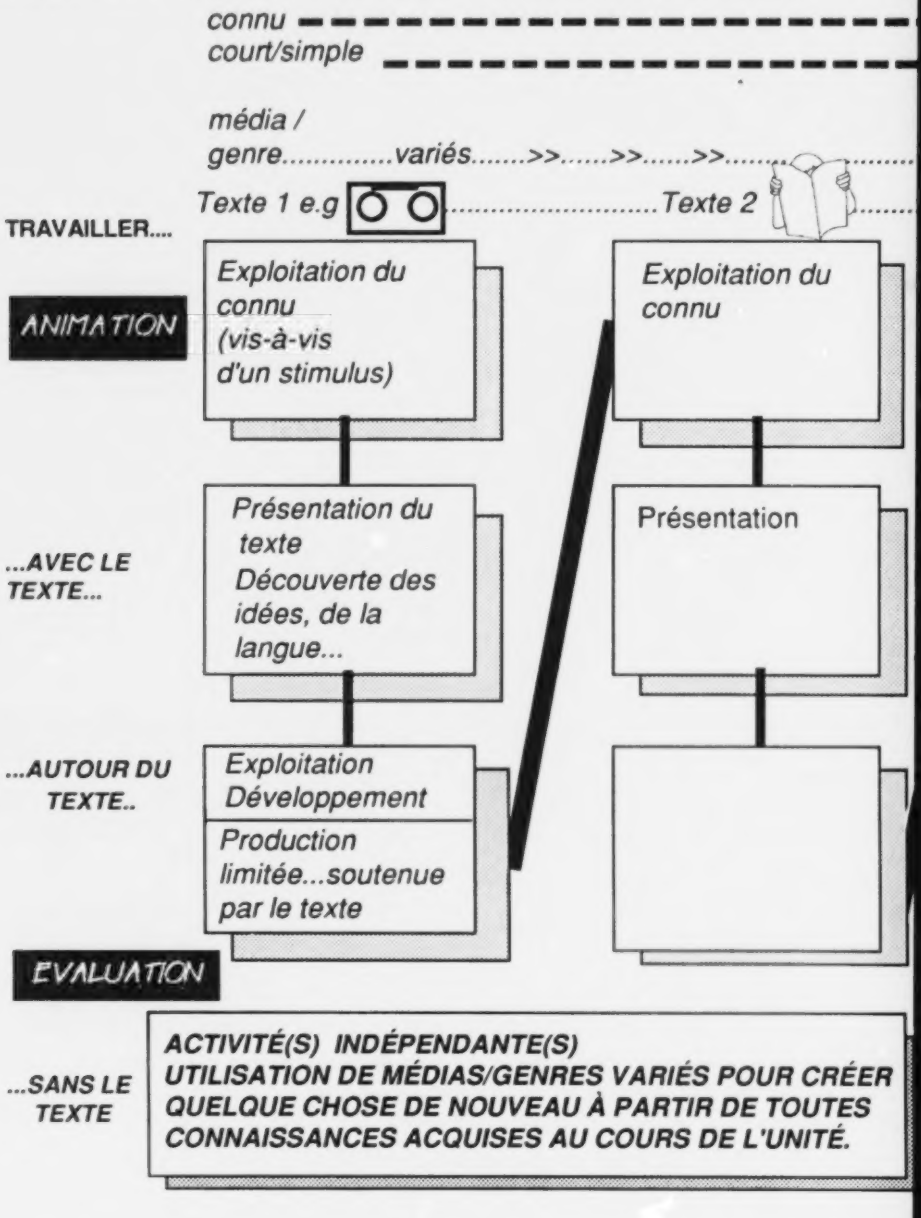
A possible final stage in the process is the setting of an open-ended, creative project relating potentially to all or any of the strands of the topic represented by the selection of texts exploited. This is shown in the diagram by the broad arrow leading to the box at the foot of the chart.

The chart is used here to illustrate a principle, but can also act as a teacher's planner for a unit or as a student's learning path to increase awareness of what is to be studied and encourage independent, resource-based learning where the department is geared to offer this.

Its practical use is demonstrated in the exemplar teaching materials produced by the members of the 1990 Sèvres course, where a version of it precedes each of the four units on *'La famille'*, *'L'éducation et le monde du travail'*, *'L'environnement'* and *'Les médias'*.

It is easy to be seduced by a tidy formula, and we must emphasise here that an elegant structure is no substitute for a good choice of texts and related activities, but it can be a supportive framework for them.

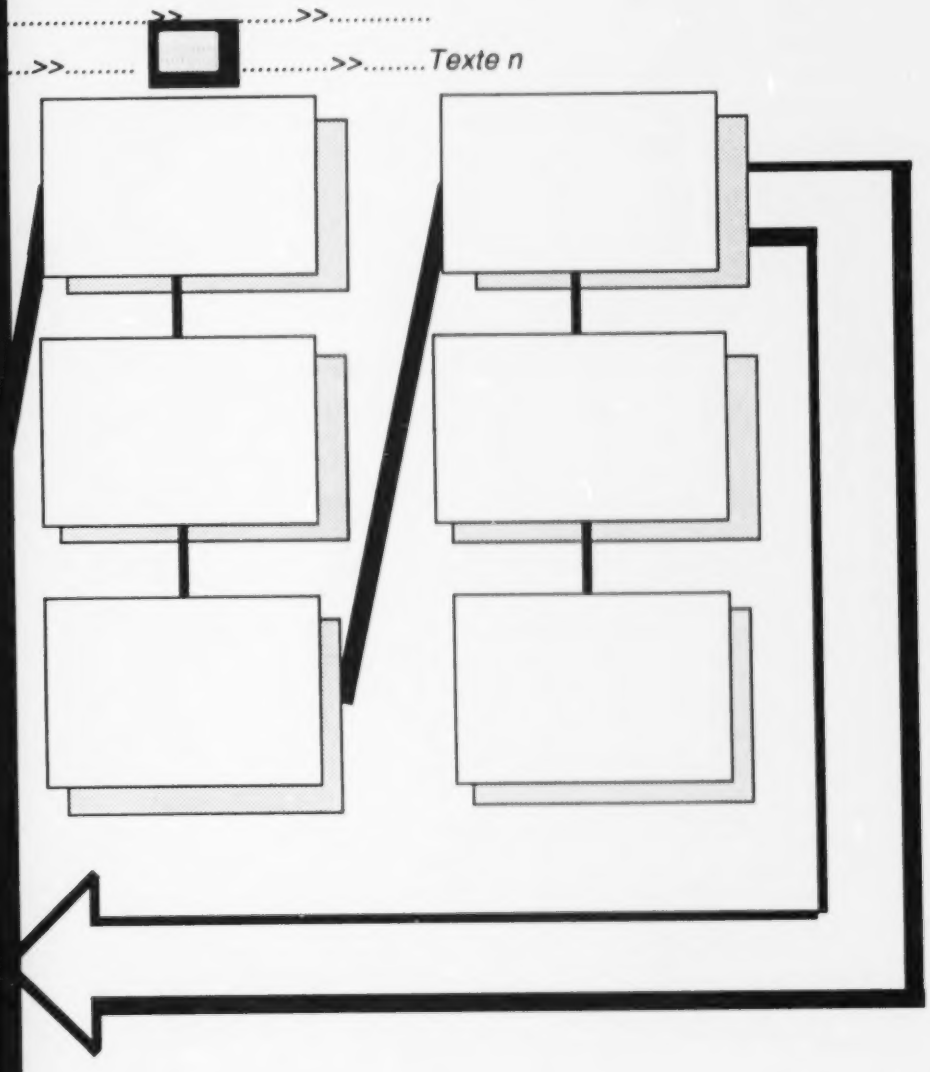
MODÈLE D'UNE STRUCTURE POUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT



DU FRANÇAIS PAR TEXTES AUTHENTIQUES...

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> *inconnu*

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - >>>>> *plus long / sophistiqué*



5. Understanding the structures - *'pour mieux comprendre la langue'*

The replacement of the grammatical syllabus by a topics and skill based scheme should not disguise the fact that advanced learners do need a basis for generating language independently, in other words, a grammar.

The question is, how are they to acquire such a basis if the old route (translation of disembodied phrases, learning of rules) is no longer central to the methodology of 'A' level teaching. As we have already suggested (pp 2, 6) this is partly a problem of perception - we as teachers find it difficult to do without the comforting towel of traditional grammatical progression and we still need to become more used to different kinds of progression.

There is also, quite frankly, a problem of analysis. Work needs to be done on the establishment of a 'communicative grammar' for the languages that we teach. Now that we eschew the logic of Ferrar and Whitmarsh ('language starts with the definite article and ends with the imperfect subjunctive') it is not enough just to replace it with a totally random concept of grammatical progression. What indeed **are** the likely linguistic requirements of various stages of language learning?

Answering this question presupposes some fairly detailed investigation of languages **in use**. For example, in French and German the **use** of the conditional is far more common and necessary than the **use** of the future. The **idea** of futurity is most commonly expressed by the present tense... Until we have developed a much more systematic **communicative grammar** along these lines, many of us will continue to apply the illogicalities of conventional grammatical progression. Thus, depending on the idiosyncrasies of the language studied, one may be denied access to essential expressions on grounds of linguistic difficulty, e.g. one can 'want to do something' in French, but one can't 'want someone else to do something' because the subjunctive hasn't been taught yet!

'Grammar grind' or 'Picking it up' ?

There are perhaps two generally accepted solutions for the 'grammar problem' - the intensive grammar revision course, in term one of the sixth form, and the 'We

learn it all from texts as we go along' approach. Having at various times tried both solutions we feel that neither is satisfactory.

The 'Intensive course' tends to involve systematic revision - or more likely teaching - of basic traditional grammar: verb forms and irregularities, pronouns etc. This may be done with extremely traditional materials (did you say Whitmarsh?) or indeed with newer more communicative books (*La Grammaire en Clair*). Either way, as an approach it suffers from the essential defect of the tradition - the teaching of structure devoid of real meaning, learning for no other purpose than the weekly test.

Although this can work for some students, as a general principle it is unsuitable for our defined *clientèle*. Rather than playing to their strengths, it exploits their weaknesses. Not surprisingly, it drives some of them away, if not from language study then certainly from their enthusiasm for it. 'Death by baguette' is replaced by the 'death by a thousand paradigms' of Kennedy's Latin Primer.

The problem with the contrasting (grammar in context) approach would seem to be not totally dissimilar. Because the 'points for study' depend on the language met - usually in a course book - there is often no real sense of progression. The grammar may or may not be **useful**. Worse than this, it often happens that a new and complex point of grammar is introduced along with new concepts **and** new language - thus tripling the potential difficulty for our student. This is certainly the case with one of the first of the new course books - the in many ways admirable *Actualités françaises*.

We would argue that such approaches are unsatisfactory - either because of their lack of context (purpose) or because of their randomness, and that they share a common sense of **lack of progression**. How then do our pupils actually make progress in the sixth form? It is perhaps in the answer to this question that we will find the solution to the grammar 'problem'.

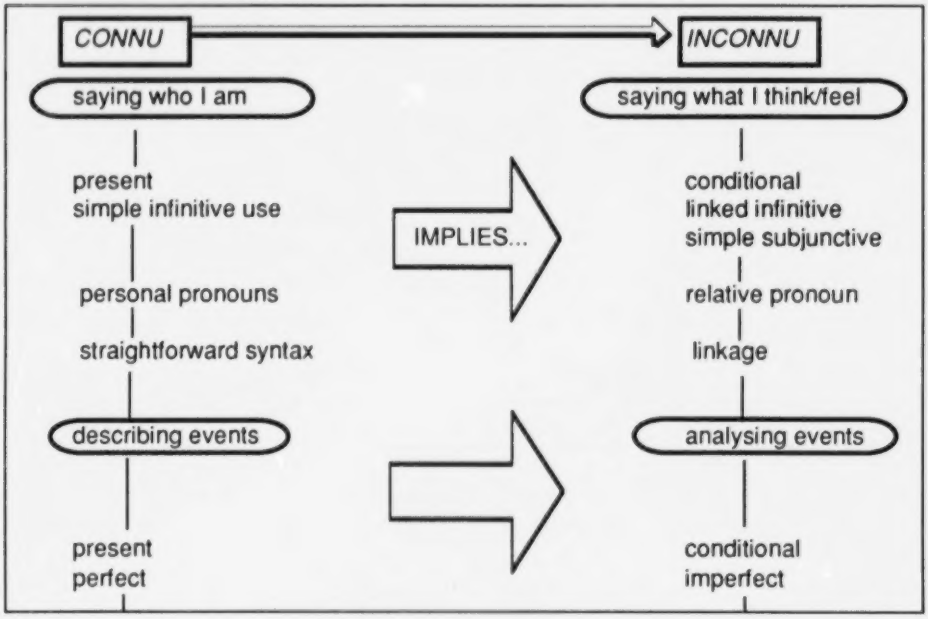
The fact is that most students, having reached the Olympian heights of year 12, **do** actually survive, and **can** actually produce passable French/Spanish/German by the time they are 18. Despite her unease, Emma could and can write convincing and mainly accurate French. The main reason for this was almost certainly her own desire to make sense of the structures which were baffling her. **She** needed to understand the grammar and so **she** made the effort to learn what the grammar grind and the instinctive pick up had failed to provide.

How then - while awaiting the uncertain arrival of the definitive solution - should we approach this question of grammatical progression? It would seem from our (and Emma's) experience that the key must be to help the learner see the importance of grammar as an indispensable aid to real communication.

If grammar is to have a purpose, this does not absolve us as teachers of the responsibility for at least considering **what** grammar will be particularly appropriate for various learning stages. Clearly, this will have something of the character of a 'rule of thumb', but it is a beginning.

For example, it is suggested that one key requirement of the transitional phase usually associated with the change from GCSE to 'A' level is the need to move from largely transactional and descriptive language to the language of opinion and ideas. If this is agreed as an aim, then it has some grammatical implications. Our student may be familiar with, but not necessarily understand, basic (present, past) forms of the verb, but lack familiarity with verb links, infinitive usage, conditional and subjunctive. Similarly, we may assume some acquaintance with personal pronouns (certainly subject and object), but little familiarity with the complexities of relativity.

We may even wish to express this in tabular form:



Once we have - **ourselves** - made explicit a provisional model of grammatical progression (as sketchy, hesitant and thumb-ruled as you like), then we can see a way through the apparent complexity. We need next to propose a way for the learner to consolidate or make explicit those elements in list A (*CONNU*) with which she is familiar but does not understand, and gradually to acquire and then grasp elements from list B (*INCONNU*). One way to approach this is the idea of the 'transitional course' that Sèvres 1990 participants attempted to create.

The idea was that by taking **known** themes, such as family and education, it would be possible to 'revise' some basic grammatical structures in familiar contexts (family -tenses —>) while beginning the development to more complex forms of expression and therefore grammar. In many ways this approach was a good one, as the following exercises may suggest:

L'environnement urbain

3. Exercices de grammaire

Écrit: Description de l'environnement urbain

A 3. i *Choisissez l'adjectif qui convient le mieux à ce que vous avez dans votre ville. Attention! N'oubliez pas de le faire accorder:*

petit; grand; tranquille; frénétique; bruyant; pressé; calme; haut; bas; affairé; moderne; vieux; traditionnel; garé

des immeubles...; des voitures...; des rues...; des cours...; on vit une vie...; des allées...; les gens sont...; des jardins...; la circulation...; des maisons....

A 3. ii *Pratique du conditionnel:*

e.g. - si j'habitais en ville, j'entendrais ... / je n'entendrais pas...
si j'habitais à la campagne, je verrais ... / je ne verrais pas...

Faites des phrases pour décrire votre environnement.
Verbes utilisables:
voir; entendre; pouvoir; être; avoir (+ il y aurait)

A 3. iii *En vous servant des mots et des phrases que vous avez utilisés dans les exercices, rédigez une description de l'environnement urbain (environ 150 - 200 mots).*

The next example, from German materials in preparation, further illustrates the point.

Endlich eine Wohnung!

Das ist eine Geschichte, wie sie jedem passieren kann. Und gerade deshalb ist sie so schlimm. Ingeborg Schröder (45) lebte nach der Trennung von ihrem Freund in einem 22-Quadratmeter-Apartment in München.

„Ich erzälte in meiner Stammkneipe, daß ich etwas Größeres suchte. Neben mir stand ein Mann. Er sagte schluchzend, daß seine Tochter vor vier Tagen ums Leben gekommen wäre. Und deren Wohnung wolle er so schnell wie möglich loswerden."

Am nächsten Morgen besichtigte Frau Schröder die Wohnung. 35 Quadratmeter, 700 Mark warm. „Der Mann war sehr nett. Er wollte mir das Geschirr seiner Tochter schenken, fing immer wieder an zu weinen." Frau Schröder hatte Mitleid. Der Mann rührte ihr Herz. „Ehrlich, ich wäre nie auf die Idee gekommen, daß da etwas nicht stimmt."

Ingeborg Schröder unterschrieb den Mietvertrag, zahlte 2100 Mark Kaution und kündigte sofort ihr kleines Apartment.

„Am Abend kam er sogar noch in die Kneipe und hat mit mir gefeiert. »Mein Unglück ist Ihr Glück« hat er immer wieder gesagt." Zwei Tage später sollte der Umzug sein. „In der Wohnung lagen Pornohefte und Kleidungsstücke herum. Von meinem »Vermieter« keine Spur!" Ingeborg Schröder ging zur Polizei, erstattete Anzeige. „Die haben mir gesagt, daß ich nicht als einzige auf ihn hereingefallen sei. Und daß ich mein Geld vergessen könnte."

Ingeborg Schröder ist nicht dumm und leichtgläubig. Aber auf rührselige Geschichten wie diese - der Mann hatte nie eine Tochter und ist psychisch krank - fallen vor allem Frauen herein. Frau Schröder: „Nie wieder würde ich eine Kaution bar bezahlen. Auch auf die Gefahr hin, eine Wohnung nicht zu bekommen." **Maria Sandoval**

Definitionen *Schreiben Sie Relativsätze, um die Substantive zu definieren.*

z.B. Ersparnisse = Geld, das man gespart hat

ein 22-Quadratmeter-Apartment =
eine Kaution =
eine Stammkneipe =
ein Vermieter =
ein Betrüger =
eine psychiatrische Anstalt =
eine rührselige Geschichte =
ein Mietvertrag =
ein leichtgläubiger Mensch =

Ableitungen *Füllen Sie die Tabelle aus!*

Substantiv	Verbform im Text	Infinitiv
z.B.:Ersparnisse	**gespart**	**? (antw. = sparen)**
?	bezahlen	?
?	lebte	?
die Trennung	-	?
?	erzälte	?
?	suchte	?
?	schluchzend	?
?	besichtigte	?
?	schenken	?

Clearly, more can be done to understand and analyse the detailed needs of students at this level, and no-one would claim that the materials as they exist contain a coherent pattern of grammatical progression. Nevertheless, they do offer a workable alternative to the **grammatical** (isolated from meaning) and **topical** (unprogressive and random) approaches. By relating grammatical understanding to the linguistic needs of the student and aiming to integrate grammar with the content of the language being used, we may be able to develop a more coherent approach to this still vexed problem, to give grammar a real purpose.

Allowing the learner to learn

At the same time a convincing case can be made for not overstressing the importance of grammar in the early stages of the course - the diametrical opposite of the grammar grind. Experience suggests that the main teaching and learning aim of the first months of the course should be to develop the skills and understandings described in Section 1, and that explicit grammatical understanding is not necessarily a prerequisite for this. This view is reflected in the materials produced by the 1990 Sèvres course, and the first unit on the family contains little more than simple revision of very simple grammar.

One course member went so far as to ignore any explicit grammatical teaching or explanation for the first term of her sixth form course. The results are worth describing:

> *She describes greater enthusiasm, greater fluency, greater interest among her students. **and** by January a demand by them for explicit grammatical explanation. They had themselves grasped what they needed (learning how to learn), and were ready for individualised and collective (but relevant) learning of grammar.*

Central to this was clearly the teacher's confidence that things would not become too chaotic, as well as her own understanding of grammar (such an approach should not absolve us from establishing our own systems). It suggests that given the right conditions we can allow more independence to advanced learners, and that within our language programmes we must allow time for individualised work. Only then will the various aspects of the programme become really understood - because relevant and useful to the learner. What we are proposing, in effect, is that we build on learners' strengths, not drown them in their weaknesses, and that, dear reader, is where we began.

Summary

- Grammar needs to be made explicit at some point.
- Communicative grammar is not the same as traditional grammar.
- The grammar grind devoid of meaning wears down many learners.
- Grammar 'by topic' can be random and confusing.

We therefore offer the 'rule of thumb approach':

- **We can devise an outline grammar.**
- **This can be integrated into a transition course starting from the known - not too many new things at once.**
- **There is no need to go too fast.**
- **Develop space for individual demands - let students learn and build on their strengths.**

Conclusions

To summarise, we have attempted in this book to demonstrate:

1. That there are frequent 'gaps' in the language learner's progress, of which the GCSE --> 'A' level gap is but one, exacerbated by a need for more independent language production and a new set of task types to handle. There is no evidence to suggest that this problem has worsened since the introduction of the GCSE.

2. That the student has a number of strengths which can be positively enlisted to build a lower sixth foundation, in particular, enthusiasm, communicativeness and a willingness to explore the unfamiliar.

3. That the development of study skills, supported by self-evaluation and an understanding of the learning path, is vital to the growth of the learner.

4. That one way into a text is through the learner's pre-existing knowledge of its content, adding an extra, preparatory stage to Presentation, Practice and Performance.

5. That while there is no inherent hierarchy of sophistication among topics, there are some topics with which learners will be more familiar and more importantly, there is a possibility of expanding both linguistic and conceptual understanding within a given topic.

6. That a variety of media and genres can be used to sustain motivation while a topic is being fully exploited.

7. That grammar needs to be taught, but through communicative activities related to meaningful contexts.

These and other principles detailed in the book were incorporated in the exemplar materials from the Sèvres course participants for 1990. The materials have already been used in their early form in sixth forms around the country, and may currently be purchased as photocopiable packs from CILT. We have received feedback, not only on the success of the material, but most valuably, on what the experience of devising them did for the teachers concerned.

We hope that you, the reader, will find this book a valuable starting point for developing your own lower sixth teaching programme. We invite you to apply the principles we have identified to examine what you do, both at the planning stage and in the classroom. From there we hope you will find growth points from which current practice can develop to take greater account of your students' strengths and support their weaknesses.

We leave the last word with a Sèvres course participant who wrote:

> *'It was valuable to have shared in the making of the teaching materials, but this was merely incidental, compared with the enormous impact the experience has had on my whole attitude to teaching 'A' level beginners.'*

A CILT series for language teachers

7

This book provides useful guidelines
both for linguistic teaching and
for the choice and structuring of material
into units of study
to help pupils progress
from post-GCSE to pre-university.

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